

**We claim:**

1. A reactor for the catalytic oxidation of ammonia to nitrogen oxides, which contains a noble metal gauze catalyst and a heat exchanger in that order in the direction of flow and has a catalyst for the decomposition of  $N_2O$  located between the noble metal gauze catalyst and the heat exchanger.
2. A reactor as claimed in claim 1, wherein a noble metal recovery gauze is located between the noble metal gauze catalyst and the catalyst for the decomposition of  $N_2O$ .
3. A reactor as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein the catalyst for the decomposition of  $N_2O$  is installed as a fixed bed having a height of from 2 to 50 cm.
4. A reactor as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3, wherein the catalyst for the decomposition of  $N_2O$  can be prepared by combining  $CuAl_2O_4$  with tin, lead and/or an element of main group II or transition group II of the Periodic Table of the Elements as oxide or salt or in elemental form and subsequently calcining the mixture at from 300 to 1300°C and a pressure in the range from 0.1 to 200 bar.
5. An apparatus for preparing nitric acid from ammonia, comprising in this order
  - a reactor as claimed in any of claims 1 to 4,
  - an absorption unit for the absorption of nitrogen oxides in an aqueous medium and, if desired,
  - a reduction unit for the selective catalytic reduction of nitrogen oxides.
6. A process for the catalytic decomposition of  $N_2O$  in a gas mixture obtained in the preparation of nitric acid by catalytic oxidation of ammonia, where the  $N_2O$  is decomposed catalytically over a catalyst for the decomposition of  $N_2O$ , wherein the hot gas mixture obtained from the catalytic oxidation of ammonia is brought into contact with the catalyst for the decomposition of  $N_2O$  prior to subsequent cooling.

7. A process as claimed in claim 6, wherein the residence time over the catalyst for the decomposition of  $N_2O$  is less than 0.1 s.
- 5 8. A process as claimed in claim 6 or 7, wherein the decomposition of  $N_2O$  is carried out at from 600 to 950°C and/or at a pressure in the range from 1 to 15 bar.
- 10 9. A process as claimed in any of claims 6 to 8, wherein the catalyst for the decomposition of  $N_2O$  can be prepared by combining  $CuAl_2O_4$  with tin, lead and/or an element of main group II or transition group II of the Periodic Table of the Elements as oxide or salt or in elemental form and subsequently calcining the mixture at from 300 to 1300°C and a pressure in the range from 0.1 to 200 bar.
- 15 10. The use of a catalyst as defined in claim 9 for the decomposition of  $N_2O$  in a reactor for the catalytic oxidation of ammonia.

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